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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Letter dated 19 June 1997 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the statement issued on 18 June 1997 by the Presidency of the European Union concerning the trial of 20 ethnic Albanians in Kosovo (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 114 (b) of the preliminary list.

(Signed) N. H. BIEGMAN
Permanent Representative of the
Netherlands to the United Nations

* A/52/50.

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ANNEX

[Original: English and French]

Statement issued on 18 June 1997 by the Presidency of the European Union on the trial of 20 ethnic Albanians in Kosovo

1. The European Union has taken note of the conviction of 20 ethnic Albanians on 30 May 1997 in Pristina on charges of terrorism and other activities punishable under the criminal law of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

2. The European Union condemns acts of terrorism which have been committed in Kosovo irrespective of who was responsible for these acts.

3. On the other hand, the European Union is extremely concerned about reports that the accused have been tortured and about the non-respect of principles of the rule of law in the course of the trial. In particular, the Union is worried that the defendants were repeatedly denied access to their attorneys while sentences are mainly based on self-incriminatory statements and not on evidence which was sufficiently checked. It is of grave concern that the court refused to follow up statements of defendants that their self-incriminatory confessions had been extracted under duress.

4. The European Union calls upon the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to facilitate an independent institution such as the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Mrs. Rehn, to study the case and to monitor the situation closely, taking into account the criticism raised against court and police.

5. The European Union reminds the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of the crucial importance which it attaches, inter alia, to the respect of human rights and the rule of law as a precondition for the establishment of closer relations with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in accordance with the "Council conclusions on the application of conditionality with a view to developing a coherent European Union strategy for relations with the countries of the region", adopted on 29 April 1997.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the Union, and the associated country Cyprus, align themselves with this statement.